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SUBJECT Probe of Assassination Attempt

CHRIS WALLACE: George Bush is in Italy tonight, continuing his trip through Western Europe to sell the Reagan nuclear arms policy. But on this stop, NBC News has learned that the Vice President has a secret mission, to tell Italian leaders to continue their probe into the shooting of Pope John Paul, even if that investigation ends up involving the Soviet Union.

Diplomatic correspondent Marvin Kalb reports.

MARVIN KALB: It is not on the Vice President's public agenda, but we've learned he's been instructed by the White House to assure anxious Italian leaders that President Reagan fully supports their controversial investigation into the papal plot, even if the trail leads to Soviet leader Yuri Andropov.

During his visit to the U.S. Embassy in Rome today, Bush had a related chore, to stop all leaks, principally from CIA officials, that tended to dishearten the Italians and discourage the investigation. Similar leaks from CIA officials in Washington flooded the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Wall Street Journal this past week, stating, among other things, that Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk who tried to kill the Pope, was crazy; and therefore neither the Bulgarians nor the Russians would have used him. But on this point, it seems that either the CIA is badly informed or chooses, for whatever reason, to badly inform the public, because the evidence suggests Agca was anything but crazy.

Severino Santiapichi, the Roman magistrate who sat in on the early interrogations:

SEVERINO SANTIAPICHI [translated]: That all the